



<http://forum.susana.org/component/kunena/243-thematic-discussion-7-linking-wash-and-nutrition-acfgiz-march-2016>



Linking WASH & Nutrition – A Roadmap towards Better Health

Thematic Discussion Synthesis

Linking water, sanitation, hygiene (WASH) and nutrition has gained momentum globally. National policies and development partners' strategies in numerous countries already acknowledge the importance of adequate WASH for achieving good nutrition outcomes, and call for WASH interventions to be scaled up alongside and within nutrition actions. More broadly, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will require better sector collaboration.

The Bonn WASH Nutrition Forum 2015 has given the dynamic yet another push. Initiated by the German WASH Network, a variety of stakeholders from academic institutions, government, members of international networks such as Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement and Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) Partnership and non-government organisations (NGOs) across both sectors engaged in discussions during “mirror sessions” in order to identify better sector collaboration for the first time. The conference became a milestone for a number of national and international developments at the WASH-Nutrition nexus¹.

Recommendations of the Bonn WASH Nutrition Forum

1. Create further evidence on the impact of WASH interventions on nutrition
2. Outcomes of development cooperation can be significantly improved when synergies between WASH and nutrition are addressed
3. Using the SDGs to create an umbrella for sector integration
4. Using the global WASH and nutrition platforms for scaling-up
5. Identify quick wins and synergies between WASH and nutrition
6. Effectively changing behaviour is a core focus of both WASH and nutrition

Building on the outcomes of the conference, ACF and GIZ initiated the 7th SuSanA Thematic Discussion “Linking WASH & Nutrition – A Roadmap towards Better Health” (April 2016) to be found here: <http://forum.susana.org/component/kunena/243-thematic-discussion-7-linking-wash-and-nutrition-acfgiz-march-2016>. Over the course of two weeks, Rachel Lozano (Action Contre la Faim), Johannes Rück (German Toilet Organization), Theresa Jeremias (CARE), Claire Gaillardou (Action Contre La Faim), Dan Jones (WaterAid) and Megan Wilson-Jones (WaterAid) discussed with the SuSanA community and nutritionists.

¹ Full documentation: <http://www.susana.org/resources/documents/default/3-2536-7-1461334480.pdf>



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This conversation took place on the forum of the Sustainable Sanitation Alliance (SuSanA) <http://www.susana.org/en/>. SuSanA provides a networking, sharing and knowledge management platform to the actors in sanitation who are working towards solving the sanitation crisis. The Thematic Discussion Series (TDS) is an initiative from SuSanA to engage actors from interconnected areas of expertise in discussions which are organized and focused on a thematic area, and led by experienced practitioners of the field.

For more information on the SuSanA thematic discussion series, visit <http://www.susana.org/en/resources/thematic-discussion-series>.

1. Understanding the Link – A Thematic Introduction

Undernutrition results from a deficit in energy intake from macronutrients and/or deficiencies in specific micronutrients. In efforts to fight undernutrition, poor WASH has been identified as one of the major underlying causes. Insufficient food intake, poor or inadequate absorption and use of nutrients, and repeated infectious diseases lead to poor nutritional status: **Stunting** (low height for age) indicates chronic undernutrition, **wasting** (low weight for height) indicates acute undernutrition and underweight (low weight for age) reflects both.

The WHO reports that “undernutrition in all its forms is estimated to contribute to 3.1 million child deaths each year, accounting for 45% of all deaths of children under 5 years of age”². The most critical period in a person’s development are the first 1000 days - beginning with conception, through a mother’s pregnancy and up until the age of two - when a child is most vulnerable to adverse effects of intestinal diseases and undernutrition. Damage done to child’s physical growth, immune system and brain development during this period is usually irreversible. Exposure to faeces is recognised as key threat: The pathways along which pathogens can be transmitted are manifold, reaching from water and soil to flies and hands. Once brought in contact with food (via fingers, flies, fluids, floor)³, pathogens can easily affect the intestinal tract. Three common links between WASH and undernutrition are

² UNICEF, November 2015, p. 5,

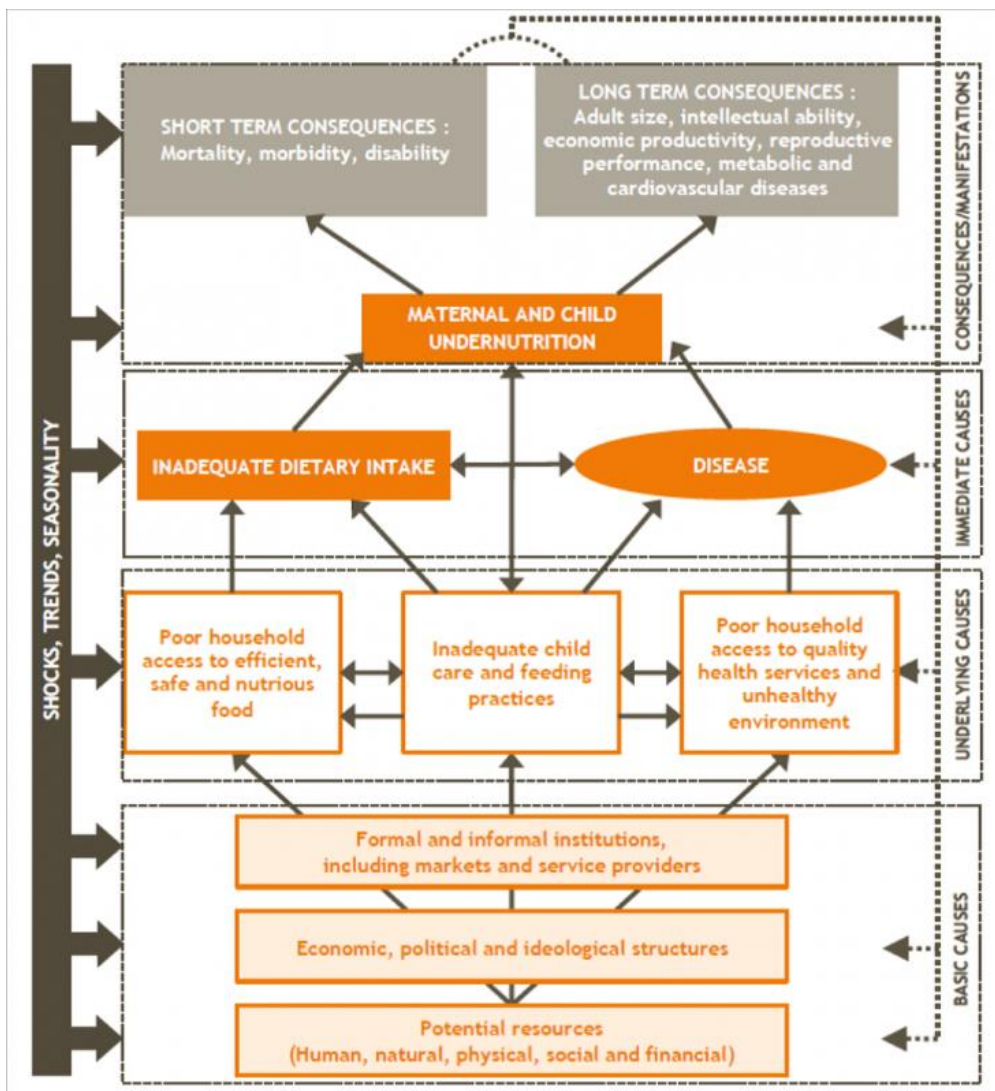
https://www.unicef.org/media/files/IntegratingWASHandNut_WHO_UNICEF_USAID_Nov2015.pdf

³ F-Diagram: <http://www.wateraid.org/policy-practice-and-advocacy/health>



(1) repeated bouts of diarrhoea, leading cause of mortality and morbidity among children under 5 years, (2) intestinal parasitic infections, soil-transmitted helminth infections affect about 2 billions people worldwide⁴, and (3) Environmental Enteric Dysfunction (EED), the inflammatory condition of the small intestine that prevents the efficient absorption of nutrients. All three links result from constant exposure to faecal pathogens.

The current understanding of integration strongly depends on the perspective from which it is looked at. Rachel Lozano brought in valuable input from a nutrition perspective. Based on the UNICEF's *Conceptual Framework of Undernutrition*, ACF adapted the diagram that illustrates the direct and indirect causes of undernutrition.

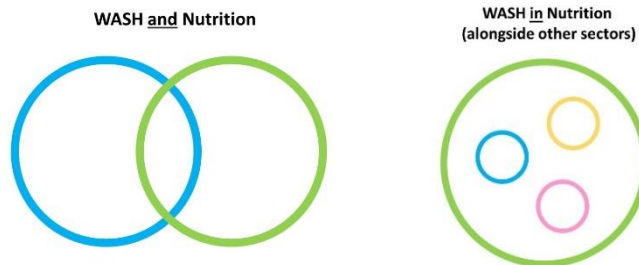


Source: *Conceptual framework of undernutrition; ACF (2012) "The Essential: Nutrition and Health" adapted from UNICEF 1990*

⁴ WHO, March 2016: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs366/en/>

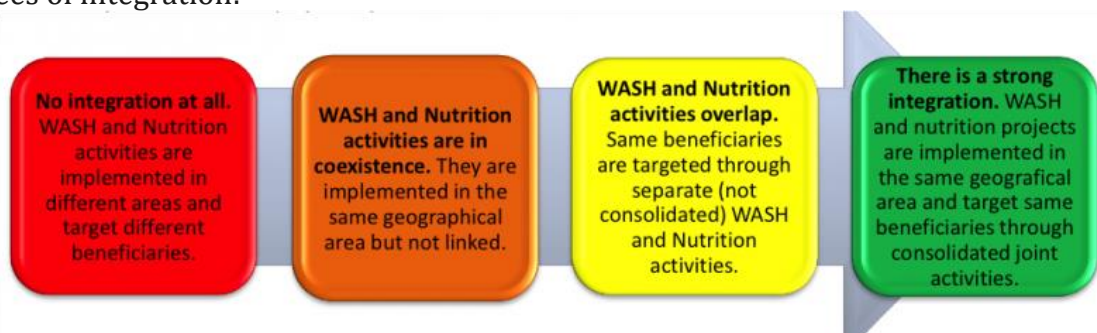


Johannes Rück brings in a slightly different perspective. Influenced by discussions at the Bonn WASH Nutrition Forum, the German Toilet Organization developed two schemes to illustrate the current perception of the link between the WASH and nutrition thematic areas.



While at first, discussions focused around “sector” integration and overcoming silo thinking, the Bonn Forum as well as further exchange have shown that nutritionists rather consider nutrition as an outcome of multi-sector efforts than a sector in and of itself. This reveals that differences already start with terminology and improving understanding of each other begins with the awareness of a discrepancy in the respective self-perceptions. The two schemes therefore reflect the development of WASH and nutrition perceptions: The first scheme illustrates the two communities as equal sectors. The second scheme gives credit to nutrition being considered an outcome of several related fields of action (education, agriculture, human rights and WASH among others).

Coming up with a general definition of “integration” is difficult as it means different things to different people. *“Integration is best described as a continuum rather than two extremes - for example WASH and nutrition integration can describe both the co-location of services, as well as a programme which is funded and delivered by WASH and nutrition stakeholders with joint activities and joint indicators. There are just different degrees of integration, and it is about understanding practically how the two sectors can better work together, coordinate and collaborate at the different levels and touch points.”* (Megan Wilson-Jones) Irrespective of the term that is used (integration, collaboration, linking, bridging, etc.), she underlines the importance of both areas sharing a common vision and being aware of synergy effects and achieve better results. ACF India developed a traffic light system to illustrate the different degrees of integration:



Renuka Bery (WASHplus) underlines that projects can be designed from the scratch in an integrated manner, but in order to improve impact, it often helps to adapt existing interventions and make them more sensitive to the other respectively: *“(…) we encourage*



programs to be ‘opportunistic’... find ways to integrate wherever possible even if it is not the ideal.” (Renuka Bery)

Even in 1990, the *Conceptual Framework of Undernutrition* from UNICEF, as well as in 1992 at the first International Conference on Nutrition, the inter-relation between poor WASH and undernutrition were demonstrated and addressed. Since then, the contexts and demands have changed. So what is new? Theresa Jeremias identifies three key elements that currently flank the discussion on the WASH & Nutrition link:

- 1) SDGs: Post 2015, after the MDGs, SDGs apply to all countries around the world and are more comprehensive and focus on multi-sectoral approaches.
- 2) Increasing evidence: New pathways of pathogens are explored, research about WASH and stunting as well as about environmental enteric dysfunction (EED) expands.
- 3) Multi-sectoral strategies, technical papers and lessons learnt are available. Multilateral organisations, global networks foster integration and share experiences and national governments consider both WASH and nutrition.

Nutrition-specific interventions

- Interventions or programmes that address the immediate determinants of fetal and child nutrition and development—adequate food and nutrient intake, feeding, caregiving and parenting practices, and low burden of infectious diseases
- Examples: adolescent, preconception, and maternal health and nutrition; maternal dietary or micronutrient supplementation; promotion of optimum breastfeeding; complementary feeding and responsive feeding practices and stimulation; dietary supplementation; diversification and micronutrient supplementation or fortification for children; treatment of severe acute malnutrition; disease prevention and management; nutrition in emergencies

Nutrition-sensitive interventions

- Interventions or programmes that address the underlying determinants of fetal and child nutrition and development— food security; adequate caregiving resources at the maternal, household and community levels; and access to health services and a safe and hygienic environment—and incorporate specific nutrition goals and actions
- Nutrition-sensitive programmes can serve as delivery platforms for nutrition-specific interventions, potentially increasing their scale, coverage, and effectiveness
- Examples: agriculture and food security; social safety nets; early child development; maternal mental health; women’s empowerment; child protection; schooling; water, sanitation, and hygiene; health and family planning services

Source: The Lancet (2013, p. 3)

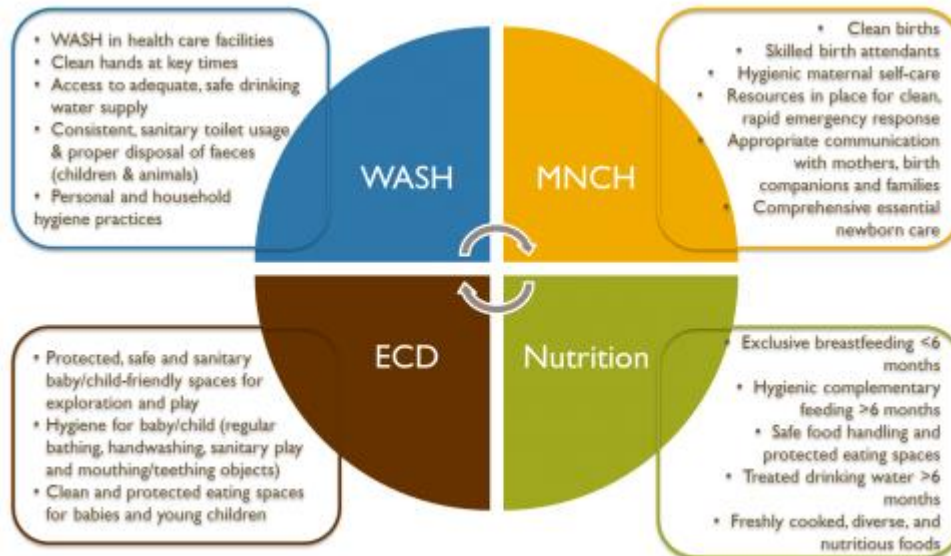
2. Discussion on Programming and Implementation

Alignment of target groups

Targeting groups with the highest rates of undernutrition and groups that are most vulnerable to undernutrition should be the focus of WASH interventions. The “First 1000 Days” have been identified as an important entry point for increasing the impact of interventions, starting with mothers and adolescent girls. Schools, health care and community centres were mentioned as institutional entry points (Theresa Jeremias).



The “First 1000 Days”



The “First 1000 Days” – from the moment of conception until a child’s second birthday – is considered to be the most critical time in a person’s life: A child suffering deficiencies during this period may have irreversible effects in its physical and psychological development. Key baby WASH interventions focus around pregnancy, delivery, the first months of life, the onset of complementary feeding, and the onset of a child’s mobility⁵.

MNCH: Maternal, Newborn and Child Health; ECD: Early Childhood Development
Source: www.babywashcoalition.org

Monitoring & Evaluation and Joint Indicators

Nutrition-sensitive interventions are “*much harder to specify, quantify, measure and account for*” (Frank Flachenberg) than WASH-specific and nutrition-specific interventions. Experience has shown that household surveys particularly WASH-related, are not necessarily congruent with the actual behaviour. In order to ensure realistic evaluation results related to WASH, observation plays an important role in monitoring (Frank Flachenberg).

A number of stakeholders calls for a list of joint indicators (Claire Gaillardou; Cara⁶). A list of potential indicators that focuses on early childhood development was developed by the Global Public-Private Partnership Handwashing (PPPHW) and the Clean, Fed & Nurtured Community of Practice. There are several ways towards joint indicators and monitoring. On the one hand, context specific and joint indicators around health and hygiene considering the envisioned degree of integration. On the other hand, including WASH indicators in nutrition project monitoring and vice-versa as Dan Campbell flags: “*An integrated program should have a monitoring and evaluation framework with corresponding WASH and nutrition*”

⁵ See also Thematic Discussion hosted by the Baby WASH Coalition
<http://forum.susana.org/component/kunena/269-thematic-discussion-11-integrating-sectors-to-address-the-holistic-needs-of-children--how-and-when-to-integrate>

⁶ Cross-posted from the Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN) discussion forum: <http://www.en-net.org/question/2445.aspx>



indicators. However, when WASH activities are integrated into an existing nutrition program, WASH indicators need to be added to the monitoring framework.”

Financial Resources

The question of effective funding concerns all stakeholders: Donor structures are commonly set up in a way that they fund a specific field of activity and lack a more holistic perspective. Synergy effects that can result from multi-sectoral approaches are not sufficiently taken into account (e.g. due to a lack of capacity to consider thematic interfaces and strengthen institutional collaboration). Several SUN countries are refining their nutrition expenditures. *“For example, the tracking and analysis of nutrition budgets and expenditures will increasingly highlight WASH investments by national nutrition programmes”* (Sergio Teixeira).

Behaviour Change

Going through countless (unwashed) hands per day, bank notes can be a pathway for pathogens, especially when quickly put between the lips in case both hands are busy (Cécile Laborderie), a practice that can easily be changed. While in WASH, hygiene promotion and behaviour change is one essential component (e.g. hand washing with soap at critical times), nutrition can be included into behaviour change strategies, such as food hygiene and care practices. In the WASHplus Learning Brief, *Small Doable Actions* are presented. It refers to a behaviour change that is easily adaptable and will result in household and public health improvements if practiced correctly (Renuka Bery).

Ownership and Sustainability

In order to guarantee sustainable solutions after the end of a project, it is essential to ensure that ownership for a project lies with the affected community / the beneficiaries. Bottom-up approaches are required and demand needs to be built (Theresa Jeremias). Furthermore, the *“successful establishment and finally reproduction is linked to the interest of the people in it. If having a toilet makes people feel that they reached a higher living standard they will be willing to maintain it. If dried faeces from UDDT⁷ or co-composted faecal sludge become marketable products that farm workers are happy to work with, a demand is created”* (Susanne Wangert).

Alignment of location

Alignment of locations can bring synergy effects. On the very local level, schools can be an entry point for integrated interventions. Terre des hommes has included WASH, nutrition and gardening projects in schools (John Brogan). Midday-meal programmes in schools have also started by other organisations, they can unfold best effects, alongside WASH services, including handwashing facilities and hygiene promotion within the school setting. Community centres for logistics, participation and communication as well as health centres can function as knowledge sharing platforms and entry points for integrated interventions (Roland Frutig, Tofayal).

Enabling Environment

For integrated projects and programmes, an enabling environment is essential. This refers to local and national policies that not only allow, but also encourage multi-sectoral approaches. On the broader level, global frameworks and processes need to provide

⁷ Urine-Diverting Dry Toilet



guidance and flexibility to allow joint working. “Having a national nutrition policy that recognizes the importance of WASH for nutrition outcomes paves the way for the development of integrated programming at all levels. Donors, governments, and implementers should endorse and support an integrated approach” (Dan Campbell).

WASH & Nutrition in Emergencies

Linking WASH and nutrition in emergency setting is a particular challenge. Claire Gaillardou introduces the “WASH in Nut’ Strategy” by the “Regional WASH Group, West and Central Africa”. Building on experiences from the Sahel region during the nutrition crisis, a strategy was developed that includes a “Minimum WASH in Nut Package”, indicators and possible activities (Claire Gaillardou)⁸. How to best bridge humanitarian aid and development interventions is an issue that is discussed in many other contexts as well.

Practical examples of WASH-nutrition integration⁹

Where?	Who?	What?
Bangladesh	JADE	Homestead garden for nutrition facility and improve cooking stove
Bangladesh	WASHplus	Fixed handwashing station at the food preparation area (collaboration with nutrition-focused organisations)
Burkina Faso	ACF	Integrated school project (WASH, school gardens and canteen)
Chad	ACF	Household WASH package delivered within Community Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) program
Egypt	JICA	Chicken management and hygiene
Ethiopia		Multi-sectoral platforms for alignment of interventions at local woreda level
India	Govt. of India	Midday meals in schools link to handwashing with soap
India	CDD ¹⁰	Project Nexus - Food Production and Settlement Hygiene in Poor Peri-Urban Regions
Mali	WASHplus	CLTS ¹¹ along with behaviour change activities (handwashing, breastfeeding etc.)
Somalia	SYVGA ¹²	IYCF ¹³ and Nutrition hygiene mobilizations planned

⁸ “WASH in Nut” Strategy:

https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/StrategyWASHinNutSahel_2012%5B1%5D.pdf

⁹ This table is based on practical examples given by participants of the Thematic Discussion. For further information, please read the full discussion or contact the respective organisation

¹⁰ Consortium for DEWATS Dissemination (CDD) Society

¹¹ Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS)

¹² Somalia Youth Voluntary Group Association (SYVGA)

¹³ Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF)



Tanzania	Concern Worldwide	Nutrition baseline survey about variables correlating with stunting
Uganda	WASHplus	Development of material to emphasise food hygiene
Uganda	Welthungerhilfe	Hygiene: Promotion of shelves for storage of dishes to keep them clean instead of storing them on the ground
Zimbabwe	SHINE ¹⁴	EED: Impact pathway comprises the series of processes and behaviors linking implementation of the interventions with child health primary outcomes
Various countries	Concern Worldwide	Environmental hygiene promotion: Promotion of play mats for children and animal enclosure
Various countries	WaterAid	Development of an analysis tool for national sector plans and policies (integrated WASH-Nutrition policies): The missing ingredients

3. Discussion on Capacity Development

Target Groups

There is an agreement that capacity building at the WASH-Nutrition nexus is needed for successful and efficient integration at all levels and in all dimensions. In order to do so, target groups need to be identified. This could be implementing staff, government officials from the respective ministries (WASH, Nutrition, Health, Finance...), local authorities, project managers, decision-makers from the donor side, local leaders, staff from multi-lateral organisations, “agents of change” (health workers, teachers...). According to the position and role, appropriate materials need to be developed and methods of knowledge transfer agreed on. Particularly, the training of implementing staff is amongst the demands for improved integration. *“Staff in both sectors need skills and knowledge to effectively implement integrated programs”* (Dan Campbell). This also affects the design of surveys: It was asked whether there are *“any existing training workshops to build up our capacities as WASH people or nutrition people”* available for running good surveys integrating both components (Cécile Laborderie). Broadening the understanding of traditional WASH interventions can be one component (Theresa Jeremias). On the one hand, there is a need for the collection of disaggregated data that takes into account both WASH and nutrition data. *“For example, using nutrition data to more accurately identify populations at need of WASH may improve targeting of services to those most in need”* (Megan Wilson-Jones). On the other hand, new technology is available, which can help to ease comprehensive data collection *“(...) we need to apply LiST software to get the correct mix of interventions for investment”* (Martin Mujjabi). Dealing with technology requires also a certain level of IT understanding.

¹⁴ Sanitation Hygiene Infant Nutrition Efficacy (SHINE)



Incentives

The question of incentives is continuously raised in various contexts. It shows the need for creating and using effective incentives, but simultaneously reflects a knowledge gap of what those can look like in practice. *“Cross-country experience-sharing on incentives, that catalyse and sustain inter-sectoral collaboration across Ministries and Departments, will use WASH as case subject”* (Sergio Teixeira). With regard to policy-making, Megan Wilson-Jones pointed out nutrition-sensitive interventions strongly contribute to reduce undernutrition: *“The multiple pathways through which WASH directly and indirectly impact on nutrition has provided a clear rationale for embedding WASH components into nutrition policies and plans. (...) the incentives for the nutrition sector to include WASH interventions in efforts to tackle undernutrition are stronger now than ever.”* (Megan Wilson-Jones) Sometimes not as clear, but equally important are incentives to make WASH interventions more nutrition-sensitive. With regard to financial resources, integration can leverage investments across two thematic areas to maximise impact and improve cost-effectiveness. Contributing to sustained behaviour change by delivering joint messages on nutrition and hygiene is yet another incentive that takes sustainability (beyond project duration) into account.

Tools

A number of tools and materials are already available or are in the making. This includes the report developed by WaterAid *“The Missing Ingredients”*¹⁵, which analyses national nutrition and WASH plans to show the level of integration. The ACF-ECHO-UNICEF Operational Manual / Guidebook¹⁶ promises to give practical guidance on how to effectively integrate both thematic areas at different phases of the project management cycle, advocacy and more. It is also going to provide an overview of existing training material. A list of joint indicators was also shared by Bijan Manavizadeh.

4. Discussion on Advocacy and Policy

Advocating for integration is multifaceted and complex. It comprises of collaboration in new partnerships, taking influence at local, national, regional and global level and take advantage of “moments” such as conferences, publications, processes. The role of advocacy is also to create new processes, events and showcase success. The global platforms like SUN and SWA can help to give directions.

During the course of the discussion, two main target groups are identified that is (a) the public / community and (b) policy-makers. Specific and targeted approaches and messages are needed in order to successfully advocate for greater integration and collaboration. Keeping this in mind helps to frame messages and measures in a way that is easily understood and applicable.

¹⁵ The Missing Ingredients Report I: <http://www.wateraid.org/what-we-do/our-approach/research-and-publications/view-publication?id=F4D6CC899F084052B0AA7461B4AD6E93>

¹⁶ WASH'Nutrition - A Practical Guidebook

http://www.actioncontrelafaim.org/sites/default/files/publications/fichiers/manuel_wash_nutrition_online.pdf



(a) Public / Community

Promoting Food Hygiene

The risk of food contamination and food-borne infectious diseases that can contribute to increased morbidity and mortality, particularly in vulnerable populations needs to be highlighted and thereby the importance of improved hygiene in food preparation and storage (Keiron Audain).

Joint Messages about Care Practices

Key Baby WASH messages are “safe disposal of human and animal faeces; wash hands with soap after faecal contact and before preparing food, eating food or feeding children; protect children from ingesting soil and animal faeces; freshly prepare children’s food or reheat to boiling prior feeding; and give children (after 6 months of exclusive breastfeeding), only drinking water that has been chlorinated” (Rachel Lozano).

Promoting Animal Hygiene

Promoting separate areas for children and animals in order to prevent children to get in close contact with animal faeces can help to reduce contamination. Examples are the promotion of play pens for children or fenced areas for animals (especially chicken).

Sending the Message

Integrated messages for the public and communities can be placed in awareness-raising programmes, behaviour change trainings and events (Dan Jones).

(b) Policy-Makers

Sustainable Development Goals

In the new sustainable development agenda, “integration’ is one of the hottest buzzwords” (Dan Jones). The multi-sectoral idea of the SDGs goes beyond “Zero Hunger” (SDG 2) and “Clean Water and Sanitation” (SDG 6) as particularly thematic SDGs. In order to achieve the ambitious goals, country governments need to find effective solutions to reach their targets. Synergies from integrated approaches are expected to maximise outcomes.

Emphasizing Economic Impact

“Emphasising the medium/long-term economic impact of ignoring the synergy of WASH and nutrition by quantifying economic losses (e.g. DALYs and other productivity measures) can help to put a face to the magnitude of the problem” (Keiron Audain). The calculation can help to illustrate that investing in the nexus will yield financial returns. A video, produced by Generation Nutrition states that “for every 1 Euro invested in sanitation, there is a NET gain of 5”. This is because people are healthier and earn more for their families. The World Bank states that undernutrition “results in productivity losses to individuals estimated at more than 10 percent of lifetime earnings, and gross domestic product (GDP) losses as high as 2 to 3 percent.”¹⁷ At the same time, it is pointed out that the efforts for linking WASH and Nutrition

¹⁷ Multisectoral Approaches to Improving Nutrition: Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
<http://www.susana.org/resources/documents/default/3-2441-7-1455266236.pdf> (p. 1)



will need to consider the costs (such as time spent in coordination) and benefits (Johannes Rück).

Lighthouse Examples / Good Practices

“What we need are exposure hubs, where people and politicians can see how it can be done and what the concepts and costs are” (Roland Frutig). On the other hand, it was questioned whether “good news stories” would be more convincing for decision-makers than pointing out the gaps. WaterAid developed a tool¹⁸ for analysing national nutrition and WASH plans to their respective degree of integration. Among the analysed countries, Nepal stands out with a well-integrated policy framework.

Building Evidence

The need for evidence (together with examples for good practices) appears repeatedly in the online discussion and beyond. A list of evidence can be found in the SuSanA Factsheet of WG 12. For bridging the knowledge gap, collaboration with research institutions becomes essential.

Setting Political Priorities

Among the challenges that advocacy specialists face addressing decision-makers, is pointing out the unique selling point for making WASH and nutrition a priority on the political agenda. Ben Hobbs asks, why WASH & Nutrition should be more important than other issues. Dan Jones reminds the participants of the discussion that advocacy is not just about raising awareness among decision-makers, but it is much about politics and power. WaterAid’s Advocacy Sourcebook¹⁹ explains: “Whether a particular district gets (a certain service) is often not the result of their need, what policies are in place or how well budgets are planned. Too often, it is down to the whims of a particular politician, who may want to cater to the needs of a particular constituency or influence. Politics is about how actors – individuals, businesses, civil society and others – in a society organise themselves to increase their influence, as they seek to promote or protect particular interests.”

Building Cooperation, Partnerships and Networks

The strengths of joining hands was pointed out: “We should work on more such cooperations to work faster and more efficient on all aspects of poverty alleviation and related subjects” (Roland Frutig). Since the Bonn WASH Nutrition Forum 2015 the two global platforms SWA and SUN have been developing a working relationship, especially around joint advocacy at the global level (Sergio Teixeira). Other organisations have come together to speak with one voice such as Generation Nutrition (Ben Hobbs, Julie Duval).

Sending the Message

- Events at international conferences (e.g. Bonn WASH Nutrition Forum 2015, Stockholm World Water Week) (Dan Jones)
- Inter-ministerial working groups (Julie Duval)
- Briefs, factsheets, publications, videos (Ben Hobbs)

¹⁹ The Advocacy Sourcebook, WaterAid (2007), p. 12



5. Research

Existing evidence shows the close links between WASH and nutrition and paves the way for action. *“While enough evidence exists to support WASH and nutrition integration, more data is needed to demonstrate how and in which ways specific WASH mechanisms affect nutrition outcomes and determine which implementation modalities are most likely to lead to strong and sustained impact”* (Dan Campbell). Two main gaps in research are:

1. robust randomized controlled trials (RCTs), which add to the scientific evidence base on the links between WASH and nutrition (e.g. ways in which WASH contributes to undernutrition)
2. the need for more operational research (e.g. how to better work together in practice, documenting best practices as they develop)

WASH benefits undertakes RCTs in rural Bangladesh and Kenya, that will substantially add to the evidence base on WASH and nutrition²⁰. Other research institutions with a focus on the link include the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), the Food Security Center at the University of Hohenheim and the Center for Development Research (ZEF) at the University of Bonn (Germany), the PASTEUR (France).

“The Lancet” publishes a series “Maternal and Child Nutrition” that builds on recent findings and raises further questions.

Ongoing research presented in the thematic discussion include

- Terre des hommes did operational research in Bangladesh that showed reduction of acute malnutrition prevalence with integrated interventions (John Brogan).
- Action Contre La Faim undertakes the OUADINUT study, an operational research in Chad, about the benefits of a household WASH packages to community management of acute malnutrition (Mathias Altmann).
- The SHINE trial examines stunting and anaemia as public health problems with reference to Environmental Enteric Dysfunction (Rachel Lozano).

6. Conclusion

The vivid participation in the discussion (49 replies) reflects the interest and the topic being at the pulse of time. The topics discussed ranged from the difficulty of defining integration to how to break silo-thinking, how WASH can prevent undernutrition, the importance of the “First 1000 Days”, identifying and filling research gaps, further creation of evidence, costs of integration, common indicators, joint advocacy messages, schools as possible entry points, the need for sustainable funding mechanisms, differences in the development and the emergency context, the new context with the SDGs, possible incentives for integration, obstacles, latest progress and a number of practical examples.

Policy issues such as integrated sector plans, incentives for integration and different implications for the international, regional, national and local level was rather poorly discussed. At the same time, the significant role of integrated policies has been pointed out

²⁰ WASH benefits RCTs: <http://www.washbenefits.net/objectives.html>



to be essential. This discrepancy might indicate that thoughts and actions regarding policy issues are still in the beginning stage. One big step has been taken with the launch of an analysis tool by WaterAid (August 2016) that was announced during the discussion. “The missing ingredients: are policy-makers doing enough on water, sanitation and hygiene to end malnutrition?” which analyses how governments integrate WASH into their national nutrition plans and nutrition-components into their national WASH plans, in 13 countries. A second volume is planned.

Furthermore, capacity building requires more substantial work. So far, training materials and concepts are rare. The ACF-ECHO-UNICEF WASH’Nutrition Guidebook provides guidance for practitioners. General agreement about the need for workshops and knowledge building and transfer exists at all levels and dimensions. Concrete ideas already began to take shape (e.g. in collaboration with the Federal Foreign Office Germany, the German WASH Network is planning to conduct a WASH & Nutrition capacity building workshop in 2017). All efforts require long-term commitments, from decision-makers as well as from practitioners, in order to contribute to sustainable results.

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Many thanks for reviewing the document

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